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Otoko Oidon

by Leiji Matsumoto

[otoko = man;
oidon = pronoun "I"
in Kagoshima dialect;
so "Man I Am"
or "I Am A Man"]

091469-2253 (1)

(Recent photo of the author)

You hear about all sorts of crazy things in this world we live in, but how could there be a boarding-house closet stuffed with a mountain of underpants, and growing en masse within, true name unknown, the 'sarumatake' mushrooms... it's enough to wonder if you're going crazy!

When faced with the memories of rolling around the boarding house with my various resentments, of the various ladies and gents among my friends, I feel more and more that I want to set it down on paper. Whether it be regret, frustration, or diversion, I've happily drawn up to today, Shōwa 47, March 7th...

(Leiji Matsumoto)

Address: Tokyo, Nerima, Kita-oizumi 522

(Book design: Ishibumi Mizuno)

(Shōwa 47 = 1972)

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振　替　東京8－3930番

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Leiji Matsumoto

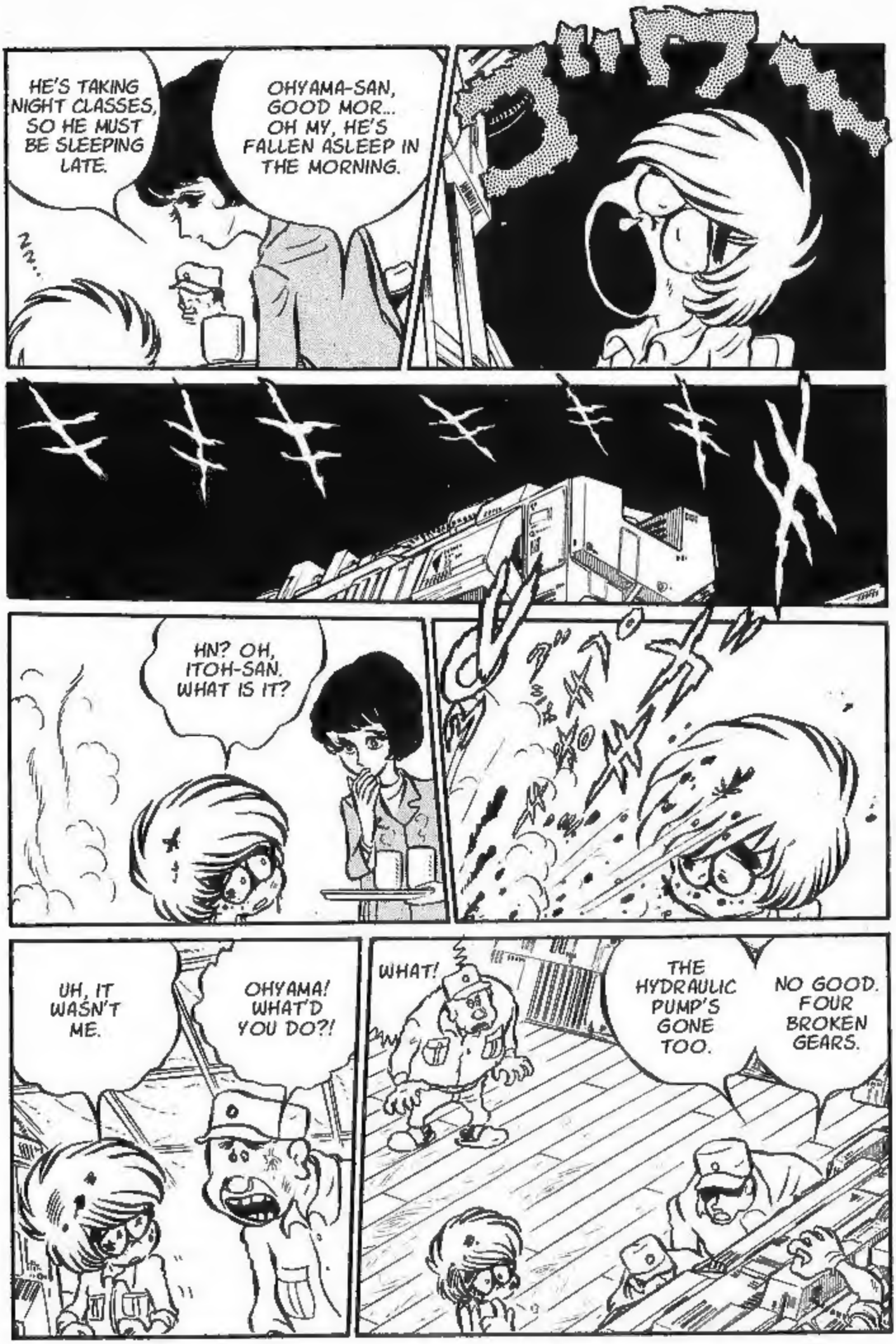
The 4½ Tatami Of My Youth

わが青春の四畳半

Tatami panels are the traditional Japanese floor covering, measuring about 1 x 2 meters apiece. A 4½ tatami room is approximately 9 x 9 feet or 2.74 x 2.74 meters.

(OHMACHI FACTORY)
heah--
大町工場
SAY, OHYAMA.
HAHHH... OH, MR. MANAGER.
STARTING TODAY, YOU'LL BE SITTING IN FRONT OF THIS MACHINE.
HUH? I'VE NO CLUE HOW TO WORK THAT COMPLICATED THING. IT'S GOT AN AWFUL LOT OF LEVERS AND BUTTONS.
IT'S FINE, IT'S FINE.
IT'S TOTALLY AUTOMATIC. JUST SIT, IT'S O.K. EVEN IF YOU DOZE OFF.
HUHHN... I WONDER IF I CAN EVEN DO SOMETHING LIKE THIS.
"IF THERE'S A WILL"...
At the time, it was spring throughout most of Japan...
FUNYOA...

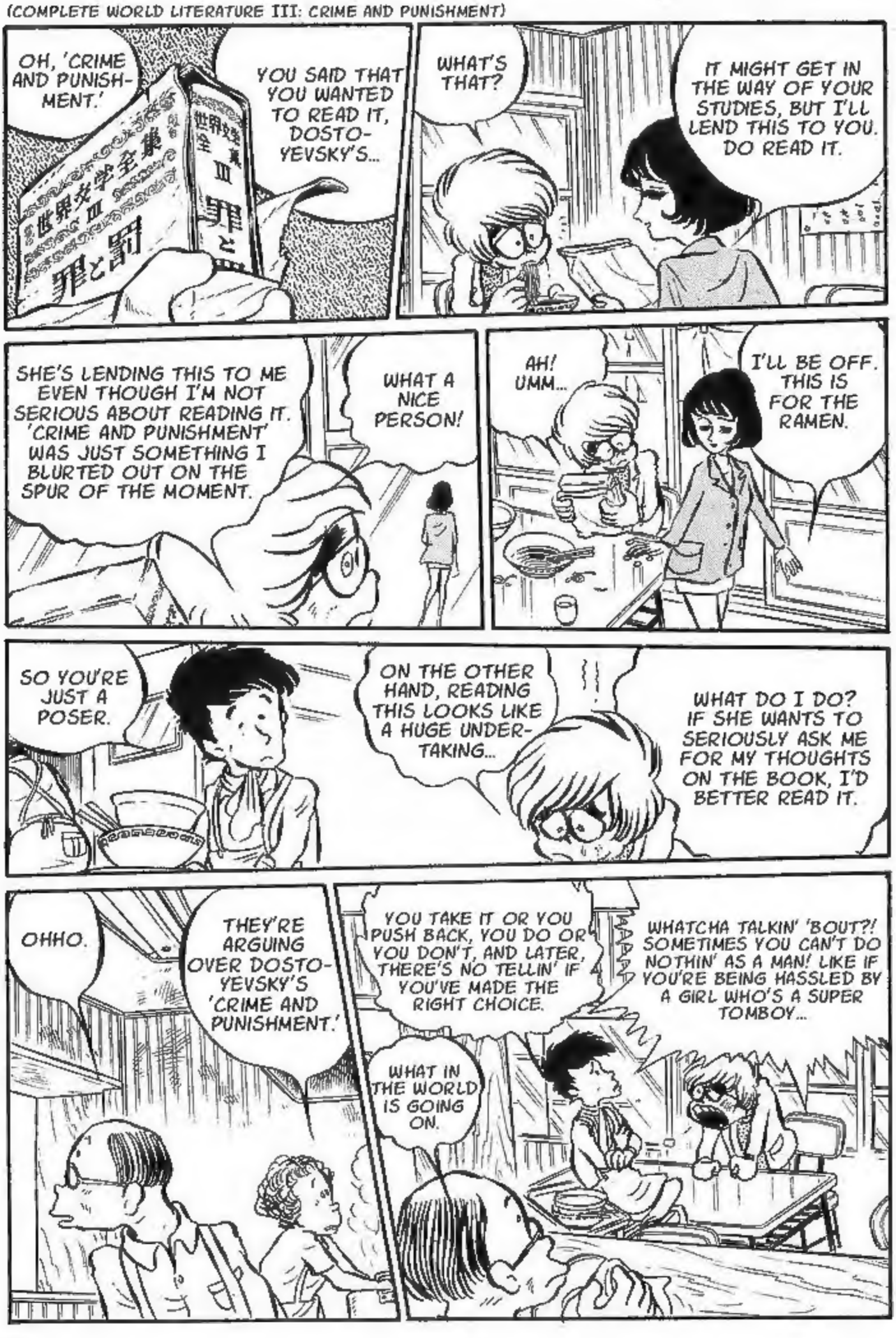
ALTERNATE ROMANIZATIONS: OYAMA, OOMACHI; ŌYAMA, ŌMACHI


HE'S TAKING NIGHT CLASSES, SO HE MUST BE SLEEPING LATE.
OHYAMA-SAN, GOOD MOR... OH MY, HE'S FALLEN ASLEEP IN THE MORNING.
ZZ...
HN? OH, ITOH-SAN. WHAT IS IT?
UH, IT WASN'T ME.
OHYAMA! WHAT'D YOU DO?!
WHAT!
THE HYDRAULIC PUMP'S GONE TOO.
NO GOOD. FOUR BROKEN GEARS.

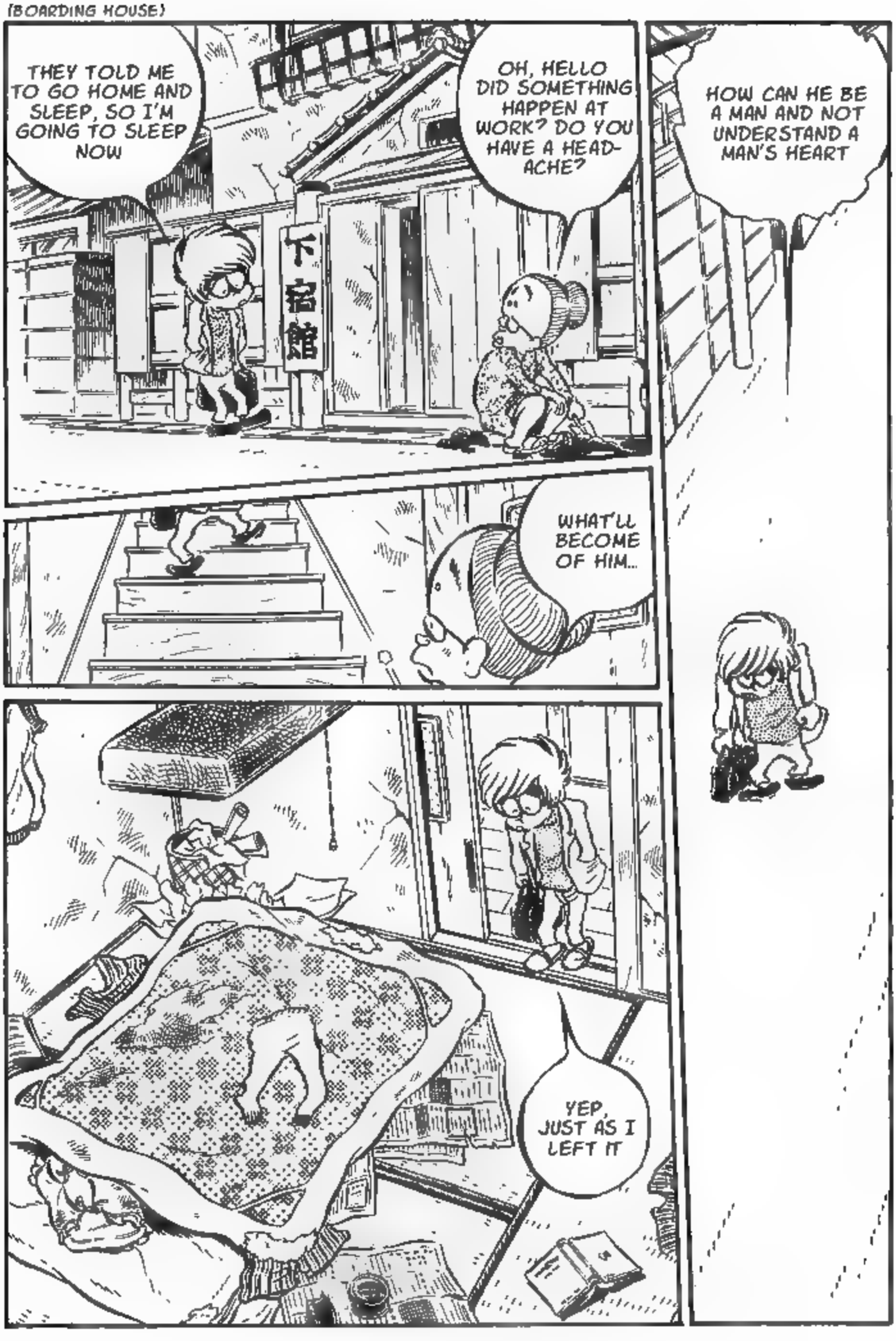
WELL, I DOZED... AFTER ALL, YOU TOLD ME IT WAS AUTOMATIC AND EVEN IF I...
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU DO?!
AHH, IT'S HOPELESS.
THIS THING'S FROM WEST GERMANY, JUST GOT IT INTO THE FACTORY. THE NEWEST, AND PRICIEST MODEL...
DON'T YOU FEEL ANY SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY?! DO YA GOT ANY BALLS? GOT A PAIR?! YA CALL YOURSELF A MAN, DAMN FOOL?!
THAT WAS A FIGURE OF SPEECH! RATHER THAN SPLITTING HAIRS, HOW ABOUT AN APOLOGY!
SHIT! THAT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY! IF YOU'RE GONNA SLEEP, DO IT AT HOME!
OH, ITOH-SAN. YOU'RE ALSO GOING HOME TO SLEEP, HUH.
OH-YAMA-SAN.
GO HOME AND SLEEP, HE SAYS. GUESS I MIGHT AS WELL GO HOME AND SLEEP.
THE HELL. SHIT! IF I WAS A TANUKI I'D HAVE A PAIR OF GOLD ONES, BUT I'M JUST HUMAN.

(A BIT LOST IN TRANSLATION HERE.)

THAT'D BE GREAT!
SINCE YOU'RE FREE, HOW ABOUT SOME TEA? IT'S MY TREAT.
OF COURSE. IF EVERYONE SLEPT THROUGH THE DAY, JAPAN WOULD BE GOING DOWN THE TUBES.
OH, NO. I'M GOING TO MAIL SOME INVOICES.
SURE, LET'S GO THERE.
(TEA)
茶
中華食堂
紅樂園
THOUGH IF I HAD A CHOICE, I'D WANT SOME RAMEN AND RICE.
(CHINESE FOOD)
IT'S BECAUSE I'M NOT HUNGRY.
EH.
JUST ONE ORDER, PLEASE.
RAMEN AND RICE!
IT HURTS A BIT TO BE TREATED BY A LADY.
I WAS GOING TO HAVE TEA, SO I'LL HAVE JUST TEA HERE.
IT'S FINE, DON'T WORRY.
YUP.
ARE THOSE TEXT-BOOKS?


OH, 'CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.'
YOU SAID THAT YOU WANTED TO READ IT, DOSTOYEVSKY'S...
世界文学全集 III
罪と罰
WHAT'S THAT?
IT MIGHT GET IN THE WAY OF YOUR STUDIES, BUT I'LL LEND THIS TO YOU. DO READ IT.
SHE'S LENDING THIS TO ME EVEN THOUGH I'M NOT SERIOUS ABOUT READING IT. 'CRIME AND PUNISHMENT' WAS JUST SOMETHING I BLURTED OUT ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT.
WHAT A NICE PERSON!
AH! UMM...
I'LL BE OFF. THIS IS FOR THE RAMEN.
SO YOU'RE JUST A POSER.
ON THE OTHER HAND, READING THIS LOOKS LIKE A HUGE UNDERTAKING...
WHAT DO I DO? IF SHE WANTS TO SERIOUSLY ASK ME FOR MY THOUGHTS ON THE BOOK, I'D BETTER READ IT.
OHHO.
THEY'RE ARGUING OVER DOSTOYEVSKY'S 'CRIME AND PUNISHMENT.'
YOU TAKE IT OR YOU PUSH BACK, YOU DO OR YOU DON'T, AND LATER, THERE'S NO TELLIN' IF YOU'VE MADE THE RIGHT CHOICE.
WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON.
WHATCHA TALKIN' 'BOUT?! SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T DO NOTHIN' AS A MAN! LIKE IF YOU'RE BEING HASSLED BY A GIRL WHO'S A SUPER TOMBOY...

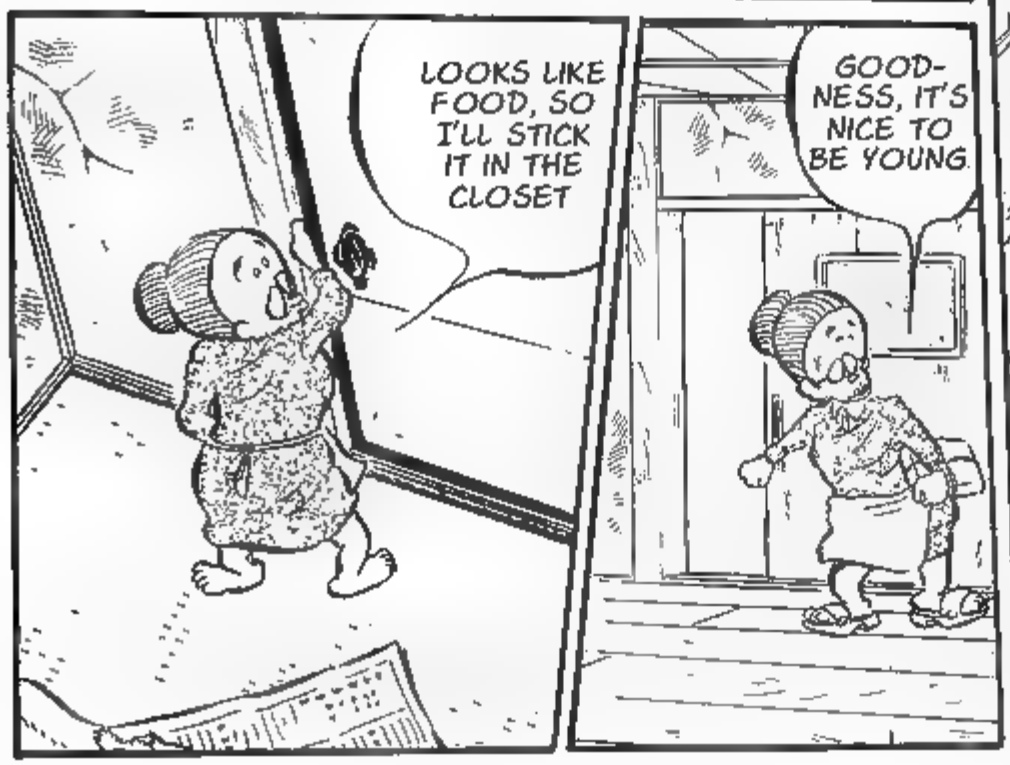
(BOARDING HOUSE)


THEY TOLD ME TO GO HOME AND SLEEP, SO I'M GOING TO SLEEP NOW
OH, HELLO DID SOMETHING HAPPEN AT WORK? DO YOU HAVE A HEAD-ACHE?
下宿館
HOW CAN HE BE A MAN AND NOT UNDERSTAND A MAN'S HEART
WHAT'LL BECOME OF HIM...
YEP, JUST AS I LEFT IT

しーカ
ぐぅ

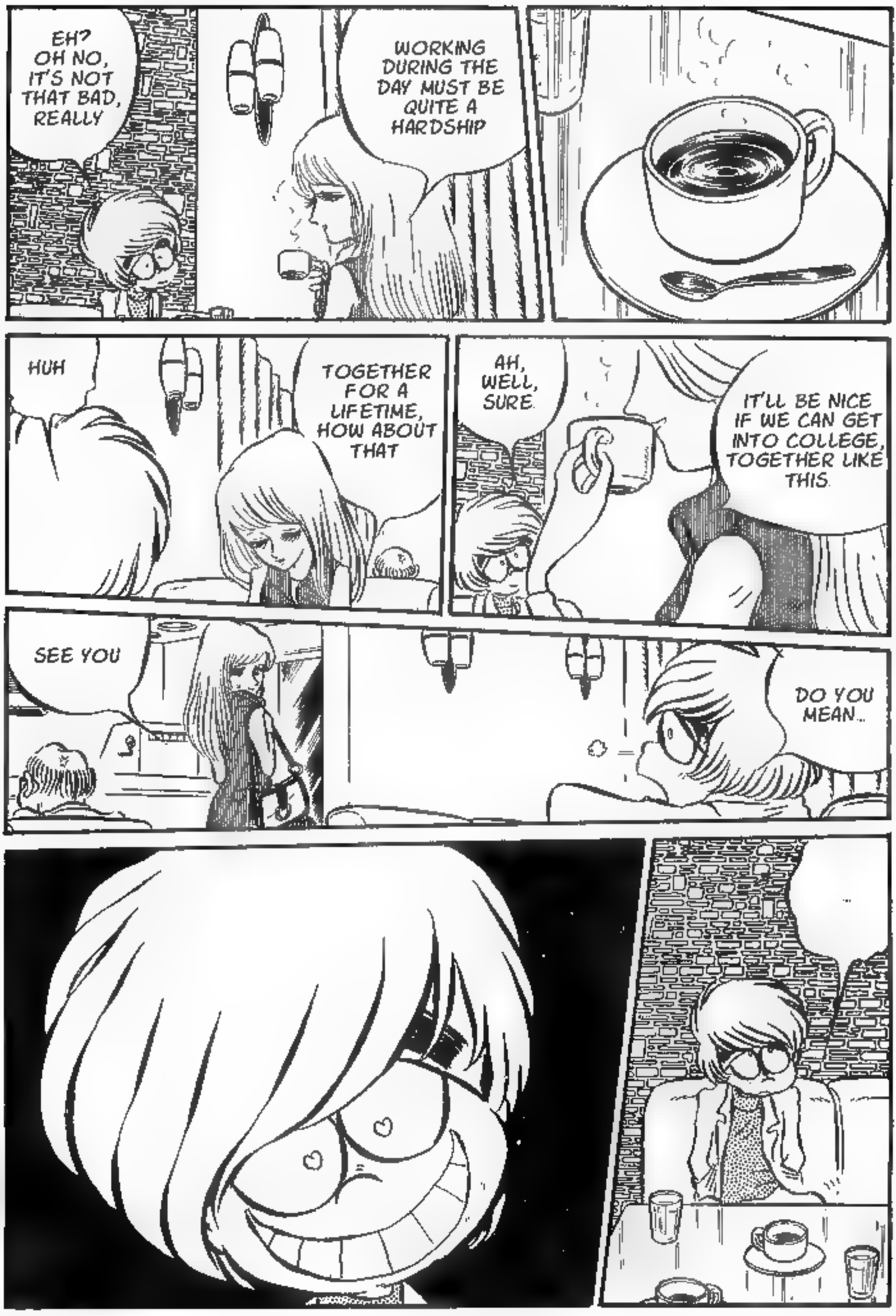
YOU DROP BY EVERY SO OFTEN, DON'TCHA
PLEASE SEE THAT THIS GETS TO MR OHYAMA
NICE TO MEET YOU MY NAME IS ASAKA ITOH.

OH, MR OHYAMA'S GONE TO SCHOOL.
IS THAT SO I THOUGHT IT WAS LATER.


LOOKS LIKE FOOD, SO I'LL STICK IT IN THE CLOSET
GOOD-NESS, IT'S NICE TO BE YOUNG.

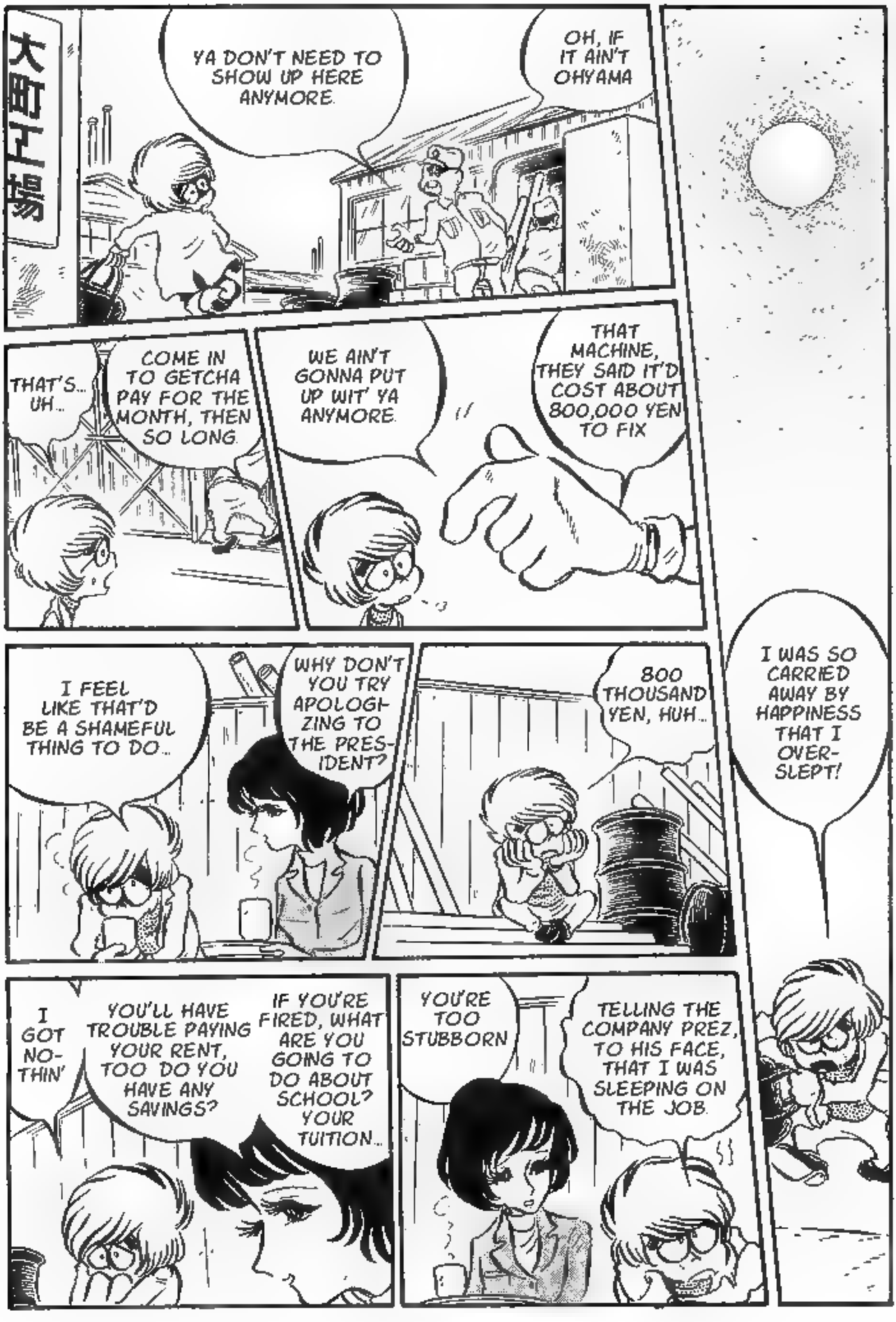
高校学園

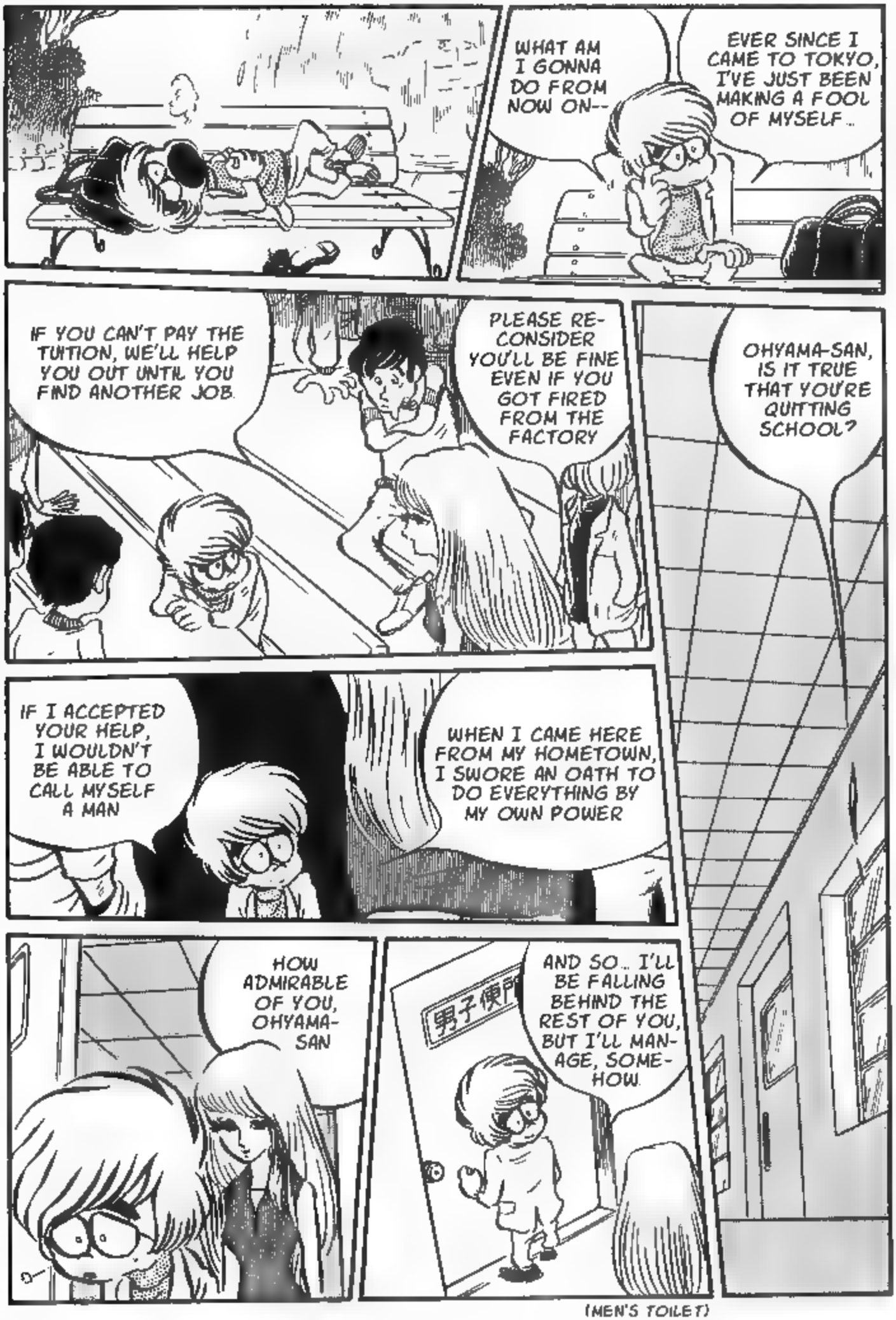
IT'S OKAY FOR HIM TO SLEEP SINCE HE'S TIRED FROM WORKING AT THE FACTORY
HEY, SOMEONE STOP OHYAMA'S SNORING WITHOUT WAKING HIM UP
NOT AT ALL
I'M NOT TOO HEAVY, AKIYAMA-SAN?
YOU'RE SLEEPY, AREN'T YOU YOU CAN LEAN ON ME IF YOU WANT
HM?
OH, NOTHING
WHAT'S AMAZING?
IT'LL BE AMAZING IF HE CAN GET INTO COLLEGE LIKE THIS
HM?
HM?


EH? OH NO, IT'S NOT THAT BAD, REALLY
WORKING DURING THE DAY MUST BE QUITE A HARDSHIP
HUH
TOGETHER FOR A LIFETIME, HOW ABOUT THAT
AH, WELL, SURE.
IT'LL BE NICE IF WE CAN GET INTO COLLEGE, TOGETHER LIKE THIS.
SEE YOU
DO YOU MEAN..

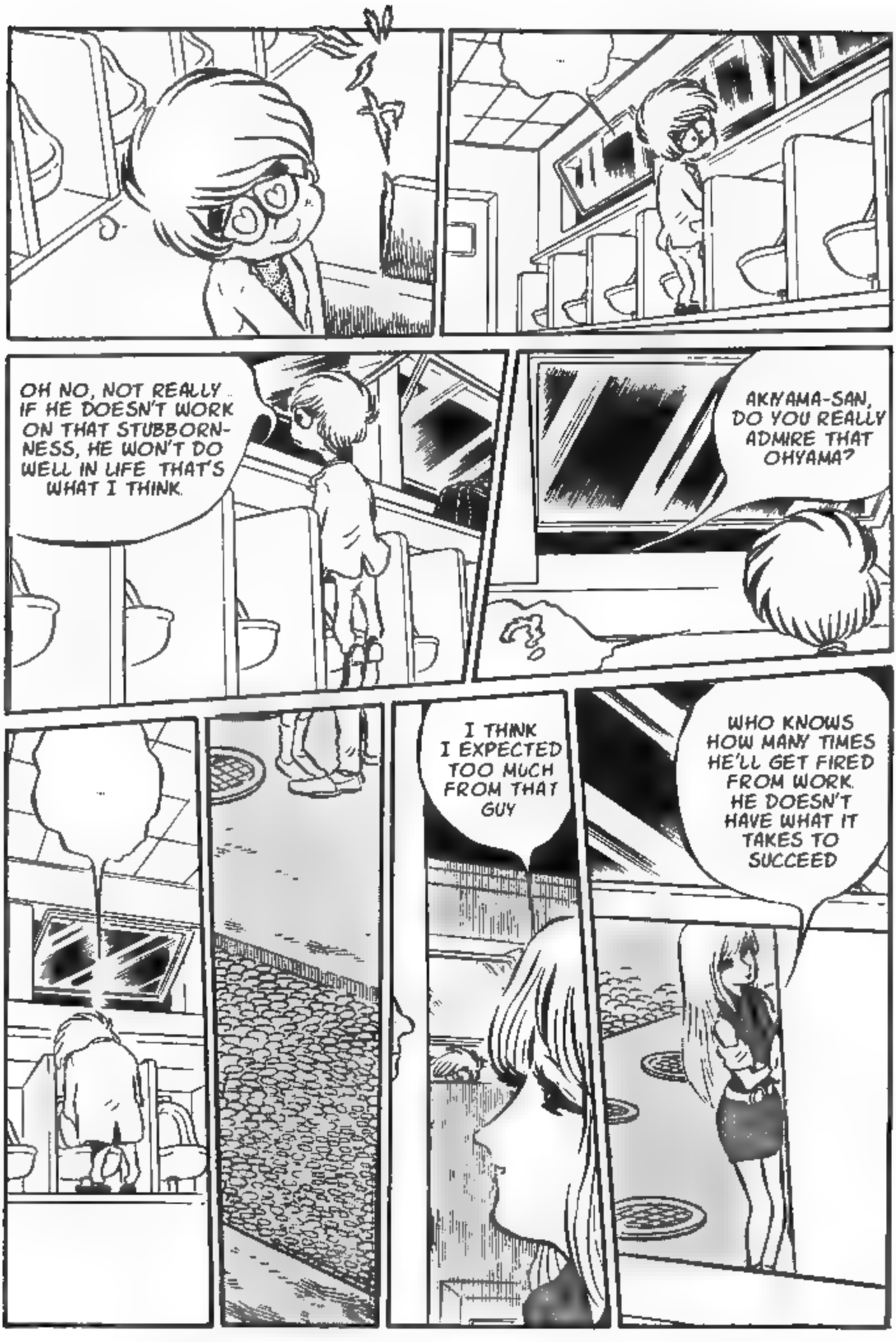
I LEFT IT IN FRONT OF YOUR CLOSET--
OH, OHYAMA-SAN THIS ITOH-SAN PERSON CAME AND LEFT YOU SOME FOOD
WOULD SHE BE ABLE TO ENDURE OPENING IT..
I DIDN'T OPEN YOUR CLOSET--
ITOH-SAN IS SO NICE. AKIYAMA-SAN IS SO NICE. I GUESS SPRING HAS ARRIVED FOR ME
I'LL PUT THIS IN THE CLOSET AND HAVE IT FOR LUNCH TOMORROW.
LESSEE, I'LL GO TO SLEEP HAPPY

WHAT'S THAT PRIME MINISTER DOING ANYWAY
YOU'RE DOING THE USUAL, AND SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY HAPPENS.
I BET MY GUARDIAN DEITY'S IN HERE TOO
MOLD, MUSH-ROOMS, AND FLIES.
HUH... FEELS LIKE THE ARRANGE-MENT'S A BIT OFF FROM USUAL...
AKIYAMA-SAN
ITOH-SAN
Z Z Z
I'M SO HAPPY TONIGHT--


大日九號
YA DON'T NEED TO SHOW UP HERE ANYMORE.
OH, IF IT AIN'T OHYAMA
THAT'S... UH...
COME IN TO GETCHA PAY FOR THE MONTH, THEN SO LONG.
WE AIN'T GONNA PUT UP WIT' YA ANYMORE.
THAT MACHINE, THEY SAID IT'D COST ABOUT 800,000 YEN TO FIX
I FEEL LIKE THAT'D BE A SHAMEFUL THING TO DO...
WHY DON'T YOU TRY APOLOGI-ZING TO THE PRES-IDENT?
800 THOUSAND YEN, HUH...
I WAS SO CARRIED AWAY BY HAPPINESS THAT I OVER-SLEPT!
I GOT NO-THIN'
YOU'LL HAVE TROUBLE PAYING YOUR RENT, TOO DO YOU HAVE ANY SAVINGS?
IF YOU'RE FIRED, WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO ABOUT SCHOOL? YOUR TUITION...
YOU'RE TOO STUBBORN
TELLING THE COMPANY PREZ, TO HIS FACE, THAT I WAS SLEEPING ON THE JOB.


WHAT AM I GONNA DO FROM NOW ON--
EVER SINCE I CAME TO TOKYO, I'VE JUST BEEN MAKING A FOOL OF MYSELF..
IF YOU CAN'T PAY THE TUITION, WE'LL HELP YOU OUT UNTIL YOU FIND ANOTHER JOB.
PLEASE RE-CONSIDER YOU'LL BE FINE EVEN IF YOU GOT FIRED FROM THE FACTORY
OHYAMA-SAN, IS IT TRUE THAT YOU'RE QUITTING SCHOOL?
IF I ACCEPTED YOUR HELP, I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO CALL MYSELF A MAN
WHEN I CAME HERE FROM MY HOMETOWN, I SWORE AN OATH TO DO EVERYTHING BY MY OWN POWER
HOW ADMIRABLE OF YOU, OHYAMA-SAN
男子便所
AND SO.. I'LL BE FALLING BEHIND THE REST OF YOU, BUT I'LL MANAGE, SOMEHOW.

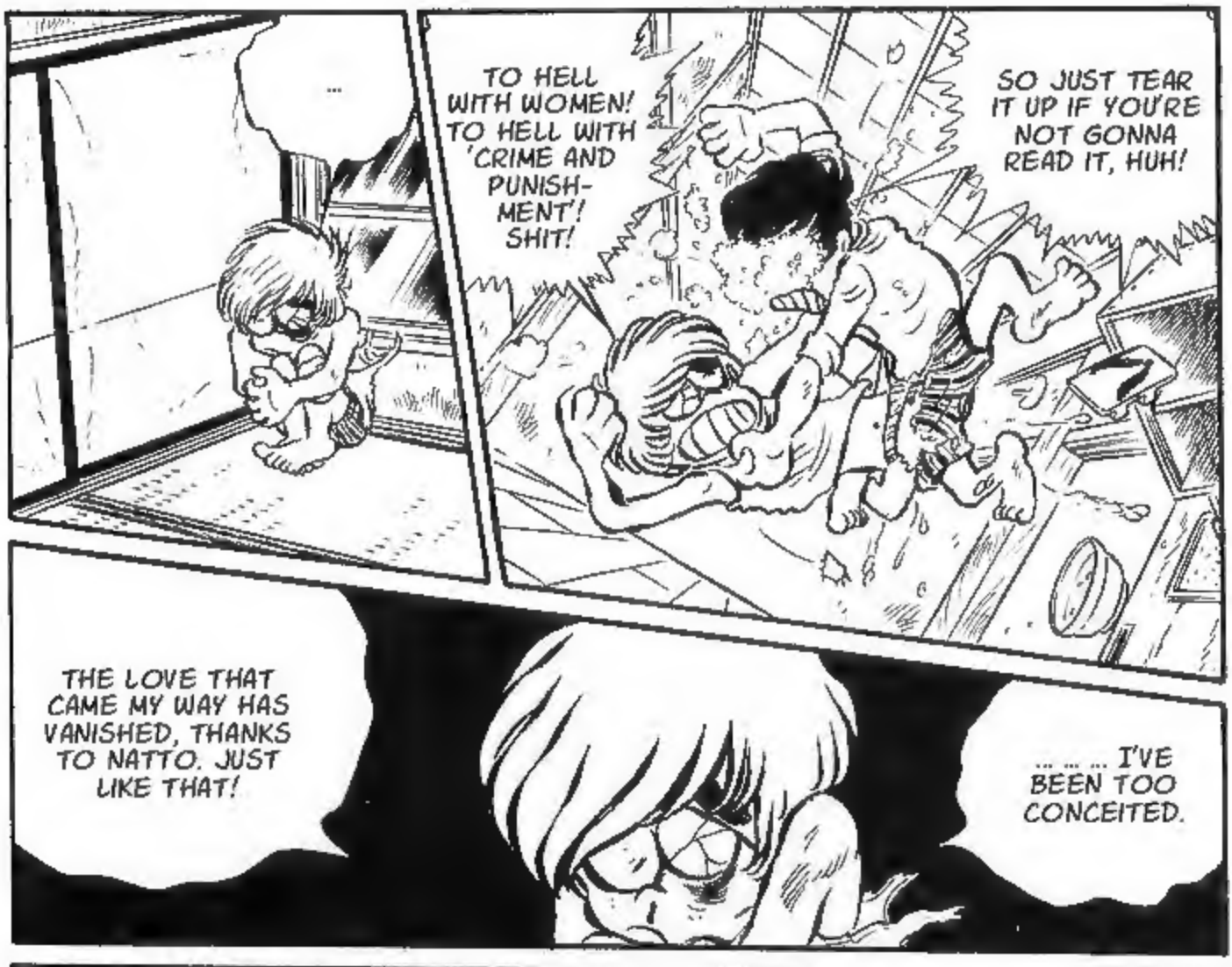
(MEN'S TOILET)


OH NO, NOT REALLY.. IF HE DOESN'T WORK ON THAT STUBBORN-NESS, HE WON'T DO WELL IN LIFE THAT'S WHAT I THINK.
AKIYAMA-SAN, DO YOU REALLY ADMIRE THAT OHYAMA?
I THINK I EXPECTED TOO MUCH FROM THAT GUY
WHO KNOWS HOW MANY TIMES HE'LL GET FIRED FROM WORK. HE DOESN'T HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO SUCCEED

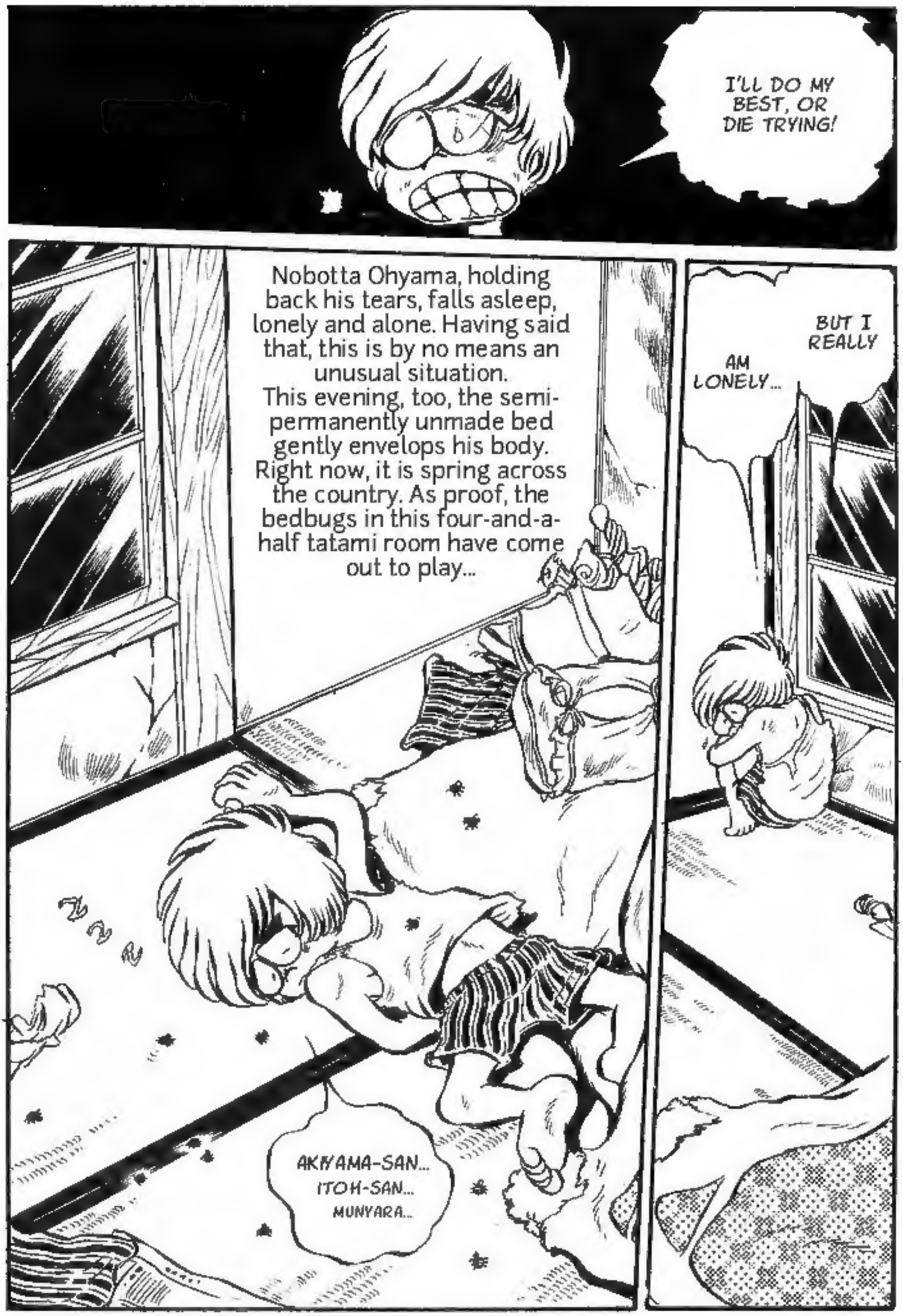
(NATTO: FERMENTED SOYBEANS)

HOW WAS 'CRIME AND PUNISHMENT'... OH, HE HUNG UP. HE MUST BE IN A BAD MOOD.
EH? JUST RICE? FOR DELIVERY? OKAY.
THEN YA WANT NATTO.
EH? RELATIVELY CHEAP BUT HIGH IN CALORIES?
MA'AM, LEMME BORROW YOUR SOY SAUCE--
DAMMIT, GOTTA KEEP UP MY STRENGTH AND THINK ABOUT WHAT TO DO TOMORROW.
ACK
OHYAMA-SAN.
WRONG, WRONG, WRONG! THIS IS NATTO! NATTO!
OH... YOU'VE GOTTEN INDIGESTION FROM EATING TOO MANY BEANS.

AH!
UH, JUST WAIT A SEC. DAMMIT.
OH, UM... THIS IS JUST NATTO. IT ACCIDENTALLY GOT INTO MY UNDER-PANTS SOMEHOW.
GOODBYE!
THIS BOOK IS A MEMENTO OF MY LATE BROTHER!
WHY'RE YOU HERE?!
YER RICE.


...
TO HELL WITH WOMEN! TO HELL WITH 'CRIME AND PUNISH-MENT'! SHIT!
SO JUST TEAR IT UP IF YOU'RE NOT GONNA READ IT, HUH!
THE LOVE THAT CAME MY WAY HAS VANISHED, THANKS TO NATTO. JUST LIKE THAT!
... ... I'VE BEEN TOO CONCEITED.

WHEN I LEFT HOME, MY MOM SEWED CHARMS INTO THESE CLOTHES AND HAT, AND I MADE A VOW.
BUT I AIN'T GONNA CRY.
UNTIL I REACH MY GOAL, I CAN'T GO HOME. I'LL DIE TRYING...
I DON'T NEED ANY HELP FROM OTHERS.


I'LL DO MY BEST, OR DIE TRYING!
Nobotta Ohyama, holding back his tears, falls asleep, lonely and alone. Having said that, this is by no means an unusual situation.
This evening, too, the semi-permanently unmade bed gently envelops his body.
Right now, it is spring across the country. As proof, the bedbugs in this four-and-a-half tatami room have come out to play...
Zzz
AKIYAMA-SAN...
ITOH-SAN...
MUNYARA...
BUT I REALLY AM LONELY...